

Returning parents to work

After returning from parental leave, we (both mums and dads) all have the right to come back to the job we had prior. Most will need some work flexibility to be able to juggle work home and family commitments.



How to support returning parents?

Checking in - Imagine that your workload has doubled, what would you do? Parents have increased pressure as a result of their increased responsibilities. By simply asking parents about their wellbeing we could make them feel a little better and potentially gauge how well they are tracking.

Social support within the workplace - Engage in conversations and learn what you could do specifically to help and support returning parents. Showing empathy will help them feel validated in terms of being overwhelmed, stressed or anxious. An example might be: *"I see that you are now juggling both work and family as a parent and this might be quite challenging for you. I could imagine what that might be like, let me know if you would like to talk more about it."*

Suggest collaborative planning - Research has shown that one of the most important aspects to being able to return to work as intended is effective planning. You could offer a listening ear to returning parents if they want to brainstorm with you about their planning. Consider asking to provide some tips/advice, especially if you know of any helpful strategies that work well (perhaps from personal experience).

Help parents to build their confidence - It can be a bit daunting for a parent to return to work even though it may not be their first time returning to work. Highlight the benefits and tackle their feelings of guilt when they think they either work too hard and neglect their children or look after their children and neglect their work.

Factor them in when planning company social outings - Being mindful of the responsibilities of a parent with young children when organising work events can assist them attend the social gathering and feel more included in the company. Giving them more opportunity to attend social work outings will improve their sense of belonging within the organisation.

Be mindful of bias - Workplaces can unknowingly adopt an unconscious bias to working parents. Common assumptions can include, employees returning to work will want lesser responsibilities and are seen to be taking their career less seriously. To counteract this bias, encourage professional and personal growth in returning employees through training and development, access to 'stretch' projects and utilise all their strengths.